

PITCHING YOUR STORY TO THE MEDIA

Occasionally, a reporter receives your press kit, reads it and is inspired to write a story. Unfortunately, this is a rare occurrence. Reporters receive hundreds of faxes and press kits each week. In order to stand out, we need to bring a specific story idea to their attention.

Keys to a Successful Pitch

- **Do Your Homework** – Make sure you are familiar with what key reporters on your list have written in the past 30 days. Reporters are flattered when you can cite a past article they have written. In some cases, it brings your information more credibility.
- **Refresh Your Memory** – Know your topic; know the key individuals, times, dates, locations, etc. Be prepared to field questions. Have questions of your own to encourage a conversation with the reporter. Have your materials on hand and get ready to take notes – an editor might have requests for future interviews.
- **Remember Your Phone Etiquette** – If the reporter answers your call, ask them if they have a moment to talk. Then, share your story idea. How you describe the information will determine if they will continue the call.
- **Manage Your Message** – If you get voicemail, try back in an hour, and you might get the reporter on the phone. If not, leave a quick, detailed message as if you were calling someone on your team. Be concise, be professional and follow up in the next day or two.
- **Followthrough** – Depending on how you initially disseminated the information, it is appropriate to follow up with a reporter by phone. If you faxed the release or advisory, follow up about two or three hours later. If you made a phone pitch, regardless of if you talked to the reporter or left a message, allow two days until you attempt to call them again.
- **Reach All Audiences** – Capitalize on the ethnic diversity in your community. Many groups have a community newspaper that would welcome stories about their community members. For example, if an Asian Soldier will be presented with an award, pitch to the local Asian newspaper in addition to your usual list of media.

Tips for Making the Local News

- **Topical:** Some stories are included in newscasts simply because they offer visual information on a “hot subject.”
- **Timely:** Stories linked to seasons, government rulings, new laws, new social trends and even holidays can help increase the probability of being included in a newscast.
- **Local:** A story needs to be relevant to local audiences. National trends or statistics have value only if newsrooms can understand the local impact of the information.
- **Human:** A story is irrelevant if it cannot show how real people are, have been or will be personally affected. Newsrooms want “people” stories. Slick graphics and great statistics mean little to news audiences without a human angle.

Visual – Good stories with little or no quality video or photos are passed over sometimes for less important stories with interesting or at least acceptable images.